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I Quit, Therefore I Am?

Volunteer Turnover and the Politics of Self-Actualization

ABSTRACT

This study considers the thesis that volunteering is gaining a fundamentally new quality as a result of broader social and cultural transformations. While existing research has focused on the changing nature of volunteering, this study deals with the decision to quit volunteering and examines whether it may be considered part of the 'politics of self-actualization', that is, the more active and individualized monitoring of life. Former styles of volunteering and reasons for quitting were examined in a group of 99 ex-volunteers of the Red Cross in Flanders (Belgium), and volunteering habits were compared with a sample of 652 volunteers. Ex-volunteers did not systematically differ from the sample of volunteers with regard to their social background profile, volunteering behavior, and strength of organizational attachment. Furthermore, the decision to quit more likely reflected the routine nature of everyday practices than an autonomous and self-conscious life design.

Keywords:

Individualization, Volunteering, Volunteer turnover, Motivation, Volunteer management

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, students of volunteering have come to agree that the archetypical traditional volunteer no longer exists. Volunteering is portrayed as gaining a fundamentally new quality as a result of advanced processes of modernization and individualization. There appears to be a basic shift from habitual and dedicated involvement toward more episodic, noncommittal, and self-oriented types of participation (for a discussion, see, among others, Anheier & Salamon, 1999; Beher, Liebig & Rauschenbach, 2000; Cnaan & Handy, 2005; Gaskin, 1998; Hacket & Mutz, 2002; Handy, Brodeur & Cnaan, 2006; Hustinx, 2001; Macduff, 2004; Rehberg, 2005; Voyé, 1995; Wollebæk & Selle, 2003; Wuthnow, 1998). This transformation is usually described in problematic terms. For example, Putnam (1995) cautions that 'serious volunteering' is declining, and the new generation of volunteers lacks the type and degree of involvement that the average organization needs. New expressions like 'revolving-door', 'drop-by' or 'plug-in' volunteering (Dekker & Halman, 2003; Eliasoph, 1998; Putnam, 1995) hint at the increasing struggle to retain and rely on volunteers. Often such observations also imply a moral statement about present-day volunteers' highly individualistic orientations and aversion to commitment and responsibility, hereby echoing the broader lamentation about the decline of civic engagement (Stolle & Hooghe, 2005).

More optimistic perspectives on the contrary have emphasized the renewed appeal and significance of volunteering to members of individualized societies. Promoters of this approach have pointed to the fallacy of equating the complex process of individualization with only one possible outcome, namely a highly egoistic and asocial individual. Individualization is not a threat to social relationships, but a new condition under which such relationships should be established (Beck & Sopp, 1997). The weakening of collective sources of determination forces individuals to re-define and re-establish their life courses

and social networks in a more active and permanent way (Giddens, 1991; Keupp, 2001). From this perspective, volunteering is not threatened by the erosion of traditional loyalties, but is reinvigorated with a new strength. Embedded in self-authored individualized narratives, it becomes a tool for self-actualization or 'life(style) politics' (Bennett 1998; Giddens, 1990, 1991; Micheletti, 2003). The increasing focus on personal preferences and needs has induced many organizations to tune their managerial practices in more 'volunteer-centered' ways, facing potential conflicts with organizational targets and requiring considerable resources (Handy & Srinivasan, 2004; Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001).

Emerging styles of volunteering, consequently, bring about new opportunities, but also pose new challenges and threats. Existing research has explored these issues and tensions by examining the exact nature of the 'new volunteerism' (Gaskin, 1998; Handy et al., 2006; Hustinx, 2001, 2005; Wollebaek & Selle, 2003). This study proposes a complementary approach: to look at how the decision to quit volunteering is affected by the new 'politics of self-actualization'. The decision to quit a voluntary engagement in a formal organizational context may represent an example *par excellence* of the new lifestyle politics. It literally involves an active and free choice that results in a structural change in positions and associated roles. Surprisingly, while rising turnover rates are considered a core dimension of change, this phenomenon largely has been overlooked in empirical research. This study considers former styles of volunteering and reasons for quitting in a group of 99 ex-volunteers of the Red Cross in Flanders (Belgium), and offers a unique comparison with a sample of 652 volunteers who were surveyed simultaneously.

VOLUNTEERING AND THE POLITICS OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION

From a sociological point of view, recent changes in volunteering could be framed in a broader process of 'human development' (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) that breeds self-

expressive values at the expense of traditional authorities and collective frames of reference. Today's volunteers are capable of articulating their own views and preferences, and asserting themselves as autonomous and self-conscious actors – hereby challenging traditional organizational structures. Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) coined the notion of 'reflexive volunteering' to conceptualize recent changes in volunteering as resulting from the broader shift from former heteronomous or collective monitoring of agents to the autonomous, active, and permanent self-monitoring of individual life courses and lifestyles (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Lash, 1994). Reflexive volunteering is fundamentally entrenched in the active (re-)design of individualized biographies and lifestyles.

The notion of a 'biographical match' more specifically clarifies the key mechanism underlying reflexive volunteering (Jakob, 1993; Kühnlein & Mutz, 1999). It refers to the idea that individualized conditions and volunteer experiences have to be reconciled in an active and permanent way: motivation, occasion, and opportunity have to match in a particular biographical stage or situation. The biographical match can be analytically decomposed in a subjective-cultural willingness and an objective-structural availability (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Meijs, Ten Hoorn, & Brudney, 2006). The first component refers to the increasing emphasis on individual preferences, desires and needs in the context of highly individualized situations and experiences (Jakob, 1993; Kühnlein & Mutz, 1999). Reflexive volunteers consider their involvement both as a tool for coping with biographical uncertainty and as an instrument for active biography construction and personal goal setting. In search of an optimal biographical fit, reflexive volunteers are primarily focused on the activities an organization has to offer, and only develop weak organizational attachments.

Changes in volunteering are also brought about by more objective changes in people's biographies, resulting in a more limited and/or unpredictable availability in

comparison to the traditionally stable, collective course of action (Warburton & Crosier, 2001). The individualized biography is increasingly fragmented into a sequence of separated and not necessarily coherent incidents and episodes (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1996). This unpredictability is reflected in the rise of short-term and intermittent types of involvement (Cnaan & Handy, 2005; Heinze and Olk, 1999; Hacket & Mutz, 2002; Dekker & Hooghe, 2003). Reflexive volunteering represents a dynamic involvement with frequent entries and withdrawals depending on individual biographical needs and conditions. As a consequence, reflexive volunteers occupy a rather peripheral position, invest a restricted amount of time, and perform a limited set of activities.

HYPOTHESES AND METHODS

This study examines former patterns of involvement and reasons for quitting among ex-volunteers of the Belgian Red Cross – Flemish Community, commonly referred to as Red Cross – Flanders (RCF). The individualized nature of volunteering is explored by assuming that quitters are more likely to respond to the ideal-typical profile of the 'reflexive volunteer' than regular volunteers do. More specifically, the following two hypotheses are examined:

1. Styles of volunteering (H1): if reflexive volunteering is ideal-typically characterized by a high mobility between organizations, there will be a higher incidence of episodic modes of involvement and weaker organizational attachments among former volunteers in comparison to volunteers.
2. Decision to quit (H2): if reflexive volunteering is ideal-typically embedded in individualized life narratives and politics of self-actualization, reasons for quitting volunteering will be a matter of 'active' and 'conscious' choice, grounded in the volunteers' active life design (biographical match). Biography-related reasons for quitting, consequently, will be more important than organization-related ones.

The data used in this study are drawn from 751 face-to-face surveys with a representative sample of volunteers (N=652) and ex-volunteers (N=99) from five different service programs of RCF: First Aid, the Red Cross Youth, Social Services, Training and Education, and Disaster Relief. In consultation with key informants, these specific programs were selected out of a wide variety of services in order to ensure a maximum variety of volunteer profiles. The respondents were selected on the basis of a multi-stage sampling procedure from centrally kept volunteer records. In a first step, the sample was geographically limited by means of a random selection of 50 local RCF branches (equally spread over the five Flemish provinces). Within these chapters, a representative sample of both populations was subsequently selected.

By dividing the number of complete interviews by the number of potential respondents, a response rate of 79.3% among the selected volunteers and of 59.3% among the selected ex-volunteers was obtained (AAPOR's minimum response rate: see AAPOR, 2008: 34). The main sources of non-response were not eligible cases and non-contacts. Explicit refusals occurred in only 1.8% of all contacts with volunteers and 3.3% of all contacts with ex-volunteers. Non-responders did not systematically differ from responders with regard to sex, age, and length of service, so the sample was not substantially biased by non-response. The age and gender characteristics of the sample proved to be representative of both populations studied.

A majority of 73.7% interviewed ex-volunteers had terminated their RCF involvement in the five years preceding the interview, 20.2% quit volunteering in the RCF between 6 and 10 years since the time of the interview. The social background profile of volunteers and former volunteers was highly similar. The only difference that emerged was that former volunteers were significantly overrepresented in the pre-family stage, that is, they more frequently belonged to the categories of singles or couples without children.

All respondents were surveyed by means of a standardized face-to-face questionnaire in the spring of 2000. The questionnaires for volunteers and former volunteers were developed in parallel, and consisted of partly similar and partly dissimilar questions.

Styles of volunteering among (ex-)volunteers were operationalized to reflect both structural-behavioral and cultural-motivational dimensions of change (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2004; Hustinx, 2005). Behavioral volunteer features included length of service, frequency of volunteering, the number of monthly hours of volunteering, membership on a volunteer board, the number of main programs in which (ex-)volunteers participated, and types of volunteer activities. Attitudinal measures were developed to asses (ex-)volunteers' strength of organizational attachment and level of commitment. A set of 5-point Likert items and 7-point semantic differentials were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis using squared multiple correlations as prior communality estimates and an oblique (promax) rotation. Items were deleted if they loaded on multiple factors or had factor loadings lower than .35. The first two scales reflect (ex)volunteers' 'perceived level of bureaucracy' in RCF and in the local chapter (Cronbach's alpha .80 for RCF and .84 for the chapter) and are based on 7-point semantic differentials contrasting features such as 'accessible' vs. 'inaccessible', 'efficient' vs. 'inefficient', and 'transparent' vs. 'nontransparent'. The third scale assesses (ex)volunteers' 'preference for a low-level commitment' (Cronbach's alpha .62) and incorporates semantic differentials that reflect what the ideal volunteer work would be like, for example 'a long term project' vs. 'a short term activity'; 'a frequent activity' vs. 'one single time'; or 'a lot of responsibility' vs. 'few obligations'. A fourth scale (Cronbach's alpha .71) measures (ex)volunteers' 'tolerance toward training demands' such as a trial period; training and refresher courses; and pre-service and on-the-job training. A final scale evaluates respondents' 'tolerance toward rules concerning the intensity of commitment' (Cronbach's alpha .69) and assesses whether RCF is allowed to determine a minimum period of service,

how often and when one should take part in an activity; and how long one has to work on each project.[(1)]

In addition, ex-volunteers were asked structured and open-ended questions about the main reasons for quitting their involvement in RCF. The exploratory factor analysis identified three underlying dimensions or 'motivations to quit' (MTQ). First, 'dissatisfaction' with the volunteer work (Cronbach's alpha .85) is comprised of these and similar items: I hardly get any gratitude for my efforts; because of the bad atmosphere in the group; the volunteer work doesn't offer any challenge anymore; and the volunteer work is badly organised. The second dimension reflects an experience of 'overload' due to required skill levels and responsibilities (Cronbach's alpha .86) and includes statements that refer to features such as the responsibility being too heavy; too much training and too many refresher courses; and the volunteer work being too complicated. The third scale includes reasons for quitting that relate to 'external time pressures' (Cronbach's alpha .73), such as no time left anymore for partner/family/children or for one's hobbies; and because it is very difficult to plan ahead.

Second, to assess ex-volunteers' reasons for quitting, respondents were presented a list of four biographical and ten organizational topics on the basis of which they could further clarify their main reasons for quitting. Respondents could select and elaborate upon those topics that were meaningful to them. The software program NVivo was used to facilitate the qualitative analysis of these open-ended explanations.

RESULTS

Styles of volunteering

To examine the first hypothesis, **Table 1** first compares volunteers and former volunteers across a number of behavioral volunteer features. No pronounced differences between the two groups exist. Nevertheless, ex-volunteers seemed to have been involved for a

shorter period of time (i.e., in particular less than 2 years) and on a more frequent basis (i.e., more on a daily to weekly basis), although they did not spend markedly more time volunteering. Ex-volunteers had performed more main activities, were slightly more often engaged in organizing activities, training and lecturing, and fundraising, but were less involved in the provision of services and less often held a formal office.

[Table 1 here]

Beyond these bivariate comparisons, an exploratory latent class analysis (LCA) was conducted to look for more differentiated multivariate patterns of involvement. A reduced set of behavioral indicators was included, and the analysis was performed separately for volunteers and ex-volunteers. For both groups, the classification error is smallest in the model with five latent classes. However, among former volunteers, the five-class solution produced only one class with a latent class probability higher than .20, whereas another was as low as .07. Given the limited sample size, a model with T = 3 latent classes was selected for the ex-volunteers (which also provided the second best classification performance). **Table 2** presents descriptive analyses across a more detailed set of variables after assigning the (ex)-volunteers to their modal class.[(2)]

[Table 2 here]

Patterns of volunteering among RCF volunteers can be interpreted as (1) a *supportive peripheral pattern*: a very infrequent and relatively short-term involvement that requires a low time investment and remains typically limited to the provision of medical, social, or psychological assistance; (2) an *administrative intermediate pattern*: a fairly regular, time-consuming, and long-term involvement that is concentrated on the membership on a volunteer board; (3) a *supportive intermediate pattern*: a fairly regular, time-consuming, and relatively short-term involvement that remains typically limited to the provision of medical, social, or

psychological assistance; (4) a *supportive core pattern*: a very frequent, time-consuming, and relatively short-term involvement that is focused on the provision of medical, social, or psychological assistance; and (5) an *all-around core pattern*: a very frequent, time-consuming, and long-term involvement that includes all types of activities and, in particular, a number of key volunteer tasks, such as decision making, the organization of activities, administrative tasks, and educational instruction (see Hustinx, 2005 for a detailed discussion).

Former patterns of volunteering in the group of ex-volunteers, first, clearly reflected the *all-round core pattern* identified in the sample of volunteers. This category of ex-volunteers had been involved on a long-term and very intensive basis, and represented the 'jack-of-all-trades' types of volunteer. The second class closely corresponded to the *service-oriented core work*, while the third group of ex-volunteers mainly contributed in a *supportive peripheral* way. It may be noted that the latent conditional probabilities of the five-class model for ex-volunteers reproduced the peripheral, intermediate, and core patterns of involvement found among volunteers. Importantly, the findings indicate that the group of ex-volunteers under investigation embodied heterogeneous patterns of volunteering. Volunteer turnover in RCF thus reflected the diversity in patterns of involvement among volunteers and was not systematically caused by the higher drop-out rate of episodic or 'revolving-door' volunteers.

To examine if former volunteers had weaker organizational attachments than volunteers, their average scores on a number of attitudinal measures were compared (results not shown). First, ex-volunteers were certainly not more averse towards organizational requirements imposed upon their involvement. Volunteers and ex-volunteers showed comparable levels of (in)tolerance of organizational demands regarding required levels of expertise (mean of 4.2 and 4.3 respectively). Former volunteers were marginally more accepting of demands regarding intensity of involvement (mean of 2.3 versus 2.1 among

volunteers). Next, ex-volunteers did not have a stronger preference for a low level of commitment in comparison with volunteers (mean of 3.8 and 3.7 respectively). These measures, thus, do not suggest that ex-volunteers would adopt a more noncommittal and self-determined disposition. It rather seemed that they had more negative experiences at the local level, since they expressed a significantly more negative view of the functioning of the local chapter (mean of 3.9 versus 3.5 among volunteers), but not of the organization as a whole (mean of 3.8 for ex-volunteers, and 3.7 for volunteers).

In sum, there is no indication of a new type of effortless 'drop-in' volunteerism among former RCF volunteers. On the contrary, the findings suggest that most of them were immediately enthusiastic about their involvement, but soon got demoralized and left with a significantly more negative impression of the local organizational setting.

Reasons for quitting

To fully grasp the existing diversity in former patterns of involvement, differences in reasons for quitting were compared across different categories of volunteers. First, based on the duration of their former involvement, distinguishing between 'early leavers' (0-2 years), 'mid-term leavers' (3-5 years), and 'veterans' (>5 years). Second, among the three categories of former patterns of involvement that were revealed through LCA: 'all-round core volunteers', 'service-oriented core volunteers', and 'peripheral volunteers'.

Motivations to quit volunteering

As a first step, motivations to quit (MTQ) volunteering are compared. First of all, the inter-factor correlations indicate that levels of dissatisfaction do not correlate with experiencing an overload ($r=.07$, $p=.52$), nor do they interact with external time pressures ($r=.03$, $p=.74$). Higher external time pressures, on the other hand, go hand-in-hand with a stronger experience of overload as a volunteer ($r=.38$, $p<.0001$).

For the majority of the respondents, none of the three dimensions of MTQ were of decisive importance, as the low general mean scores indicate (equal to 2.24 or lower on a 5-point scale). Only external time pressures played a (crucial) role for about one fourth of ex-volunteers. An analysis of variance (ANOVA, results not shown) across the different categories of former volunteers further indicates that no significant differences exist based on the duration of involvement. Comparing former patterns of involvement, significant differences in means scores occur for 'dissatisfaction' and 'overload'. On average, dissatisfaction with volunteering was more important for 'all-round core volunteers' (mean=2.5), while it was less important for 'peripheral volunteers' (mean=1.7). The latter were slightly more likely to quit because of the burden of volunteering (mean=1.9) than the all-round and service oriented core volunteers (mean=1.7 and 1.4 respectively). External time pressures appeared to affect all categories of ex-volunteers in a similar way.

The weak support for all three dimensions could imply that the decision to stop volunteering was rooted in a very specific reason (or reasons) that did not necessarily correlate with other reasons on the basis of a common underlying 'dimension'. An examination of the respondents' scores on the individual items (results not shown) indicated that across all categories of former volunteers, a majority of 54.6% expressed agreement with one particular reason: their volunteer involvement got into conflict with their regular job or studies. Two other statements received (full) support from about one third of the ex-volunteers. First, 32.3% indicated that they quit in order to have more time for their families. Across categories, in particular all-round (50.0%) and long-term (48.6%) involvements weighed heavily on family relations, whereas this reason was of considerably less importance to 'early leavers' (8.7%) and 'peripheral volunteers' (26.8%). Second, 30.9% agreed with the statement about feelings of discontent about changes in the course of organization, with a similar division of evaluation between all-round (55.6%) and long-term (45.9%) involvements

on the one hand, and those of ‘early leavers’ (4.3%) and ‘peripheral volunteers’ (14.3%) on the other. Remarkably, more than one third of ‘peripheral volunteers’ and ‘early leavers’ dropped out simply because they did not have the intention to volunteer in the first place (33.3% and 36.0% respectively).[(3)]

Open-ended questions

In a second step, former volunteers were compared on the basis of their accounts of reasons for quitting based on the open-ended questions, hereby distinguishing between personal and organizational reasons for quitting. A descriptive analysis (results not shown) indicates that 47.5% of respondents reported a combination of personal and organization-related reasons. About one third (35.3%) stated that their decision to quit was only based on personal circumstances. Only 17.2% stopped merely because of organizational reasons. In general, an overall majority of 82.8% mentioned at least one personal reason, whereas 35.3% did not raise a single organizational issue. Furthermore, although the differences were not significant, it seemed that the more intensive or long-term the volunteers were involved; the more emphasis they put on organizational topics.

Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of the topics across categories of former volunteers. The reported frequencies per category reflect the results based on the analysis of the dimensions of MTQ, as discussed above. First, work and study put the most important constraints on a continued involvement. Furthermore, family matters more often intervened if the ex-volunteer participated on a more intensive or long-term basis, whereas other leisure activities were more tempting for peripheral volunteers and early leavers. With regard to organizational reasons, the functioning of RCF or the local chapter was the dominant malefactor. And again: the more intensively or long-term involved, the more likely organizational factors induced the decision to quit.

[Table 3 here]

Personal reasons

A more in-depth qualitative analysis of respondents' qualitative (open-ended) answers with regard to personal reasons for quitting (i.e., the categories of work, family, and leisure time) clearly reflected the abovementioned 'external time pressure'. They quit volunteering because they could no longer spend enough time with their family, and/or because they needed (or wanted) to invest more time in their job, and/or because they desired to have more (i.e., less 'serious' or 'obligatory'– see Stebbins, 1996, 2000) leisure time. Their volunteer involvement in RCF had become an insurmountable barrier to either one of these endeavors. The analysis furthermore revealed that different categories were closely intertwined in practice. As a rule, it had been a combination of time pressures related to work, family, and leisure time that induced the volunteers to terminate their involvement.

Family – More specific, in the 'family' category, family building or extension, the care for young or disabled children, or the leisure activities of the children caused serious time constraints. Furthermore, some respondents reported that the irregular hours and weekend work characteristic of volunteering for RCF caused serious conflicts with their partner; hence they deemed it more important to spend time with their partner and children. In some cases, the intensive care for a sick, disabled or elderly family member, as well as going through a divorce were also mentioned as causes for quitting.

Work – Specific work-related reasons included being at the start of a career building, having a very demanding job, working irregular hours or working at other moments than during daytime, and being confronted with substantial changes in the work situation (i.e., extra tasks or responsibilities, additional education or training). Students complained that volunteer activities were too often organized during periods of examination. Some of them

wanted to use volunteering for building their resume and developing certain competences but quit when their expectations were not fully met.

Leisure – With respect to leisure time, some respondents considered other leisure activities such as sports, associational memberships, or cultural activities, more important and desired to invest more time in these hobbies at the expense of volunteering. The reasons mentioned in the category 'other personal reasons' are not specifically related to the (lack of) time issue. On the one hand, responses referred to health problems such as an operation or (chronical) illness, an accident, or physical limitations among elderly. On the other hand, respondents mentioned a variety of practical reasons: they had moved to a different place; they had no adequate means of transport; or they were building a house.

Organization-related reasons

Organization-related reasons for quitting clustered into three dimensions: the organization of the volunteer work; the institutional structure or the governance of the organization; and volunteers' affective experiences in terms of their feelings of satisfaction, recognition, and appreciation. Combined, these dimensions provide some core ingredients of successful volunteer management as they point to the decisive importance of the following aspects: tailoring tasks to the interests, capacities, and possibilities of the volunteers; ensuring that volunteers have all resources needed; providing sufficient support and supervision; entrusting volunteers with sufficient autonomy, voice and responsibility; and making sure that volunteers feel needed and valued (Hager & Brudney, 2004; Meijs & Brudney, 2007).

Organization of the volunteer work –With respect to the volunteer work itself, two main sources of dissatisfaction existed: a perceived mismatch with volunteers' preferences and competences, and a lack of support and supervision. First, respondents pointed to the importance of tailoring the nature and amount of volunteer work to individual interests and

preferences, and to volunteers' subjective perception of their skills and competences. For example, it was important that volunteers regarded their job as useful, as something with which they could actually contribute or make a difference. The work had to be interesting, challenging, diversified, and give the volunteers the opportunity to learn through their volunteer efforts. In addition, the amount of work had to be neither too little nor too much. Too little work undermined the volunteers' enthusiasm, whereas a too demanding volunteer job led to a feeling of overload or even symptoms of burnout. This implies that the level of obligation and responsibility involved in the work mattered: on the one hand, ex-volunteers quit because too many or wrongful demands were put on them, but on the other, also because their own expectations and demands were not met by the organization. Some ex-volunteers for instance criticized the lack of autonomy in task performance and the limited opportunity for individual initiatives and inputs. In sum, these findings pointed to the importance of a balanced task performance. On one hand, volunteers got discouraged if the volunteer work entailed too little responsibilities or challenges, if they did not learn anything new, if they felt like wasting their time, and so forth. On the other hand, a too heavy or difficult workload, and too many obligations were off-putting as well.

Second, a perceived lack of support was related to issues of training, material support, and coordination and guidance. Respondents commented on training procedures that were too protracted, useless courses or courses that were not up-to-date, and insufficient career opportunities. Material support sometimes failed because of sub-optimal circumstances in which respondents had to work, such as defective equipment, or insufficient reimbursement of expenses. With regard to coordination and guidance, reasons mentioned were lack of information about volunteer activities, a feeling of being left to one's own devices, problems related to a bad timing of interventions or division of tasks. Some ex-volunteers further

complained about the lack of clear arrangements about the size of the tasks prior to their actual performance.

Governance – A second group of organization-related reasons for quitting concerned the way in which the organization was governed. The first type of lamentation had to do with the hierarchical structure of the organization. Some respondents perceived RCF as a too centralized and bureaucratic apparatus in which efficient collaboration and transparent interaction between different levels were difficult. Some respondents were discouraged by the structural inability to actually change things or by misunderstandings between vertical organizational levels. Critiques regarding hierarchical relationships were also directed to the local chapter. Several respondents reported a problematic gap between the local leadership and the 'rank and file' volunteers. Some respondents brought charges against the elitist attitudes of certain officeholders, while for others, a new chairperson taking up office meant such a dramatic turning point in the matter of course in the local chapter that they could no longer agree or stay. Another reason for quitting was grounded in the lack of voice in the way in which the chapter or program was run or in how the work was organized.

Affective component – Organization-related reasons for quitting were not only rooted in structural features such as the vertical, multileveled constellation of RCF, but also depended on volunteers' affective experiences within this organizational framework, that is, on their feelings of satisfaction, recognition, and appreciation. Volunteers' interpersonal relationships within fellow volunteers proved to be a main source of dissatisfaction. Several respondents stated that the bad atmosphere in the volunteer group had made them decide to leave. Gossip, quarreling, a lack of team spirit, envy and competition, or implicit norms and judgments about the nature and intensity of participation, hampered volunteers' enthusiasm. The qualitative responses also indicated that approval by beneficiaries and the broader public were a factor not to be neglected. Experience of lack of appreciation during the fieldwork, and

negative comments or reactions by clients or the broader public in some cases caused a termination of the involvement.

In addition, being valued as a volunteer and receiving recognition by superiors were important ingredients for sustained volunteering. In this respect, a word of gratitude, organizing a little dinner or party, or receiving a medal could make a huge difference. Besides such expressions of gratitude, trust appeared to be a critical key word in recognizing volunteers' contribution to the organization: a fundamental trust in their competences, as shown by delegating substantial responsibility to the volunteers, by allowing them to perform complex tasks and by giving them the autonomy to take initiative. Recognition essentially related to taking the volunteers seriously, respecting them as persons with certain gifts and ambitions, and treating them as full members of the organization.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study considered the thesis that volunteering is gaining a fundamentally new quality as a result of broader social and cultural changes. More specifically, it dealt with the question of whether the decision to quit volunteering may be considered part of the new 'politics of self-actualization' or the active and permanent monitoring of individualized life courses.

It first appears that the prototypical ex-volunteer of RCF did not exist. Volunteer turnover in RCF reflected a large diversity in former styles of involvement as well as in grounds for quitting. Ex-volunteers, furthermore, did not systematically differ from the sample of volunteers with regard to their social background profiles, patterns of involvement, or strength of organizational attachment. The first main hypothesis, namely that there would be a higher incidence of 'new stylish' volunteering in the group of former volunteers of RCF, could not be confirmed.

Regarding reasons for quitting, this paper secondly hypothesized that former volunteers would frame their reasons for quitting primarily in terms of individualized narratives and processes of self-actualization and thus put biographical reasons first. With regard to the relative importance of personal and organization-related reasons for quitting, first, volunteer turnover in RCF must be understood in terms of a biographical and organizational (mis-)match, and a complex interplay between both components existed. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that a biographical (mis-)match, mainly in terms of an objective-structural availability, functioned as a precondition for the nature of the volunteer experience. In addition, the organizational environment had a differential impact: the more intensively and long-term volunteers were involved, the more crucial organizational factors became in their evaluation of the volunteer experience and their motivation to continue volunteering.

Although the assumption of a biographical match turned out to act as a key mechanism underlying the decision to quit, an understanding in terms of 'politics of self-actualization' clearly must be put into perspective. The findings indicate that the decision to quit more likely resulted from a concurrence of circumstances than (merely) from 'active life politics', and that the decision should be understood against the background of the routine nature of everyday practices rather than as part of an autonomous and self-conscious life design. In the population of ex-volunteers studied, 'active choice' usually occurred in a much more ordinary way than theoretically conceived. Unlike the self-conscious and clever actor permanently balancing the pros and cons of his choices, in an ever-lasting search for the ultimate lifestyle, the ultimate relationship, the ultimate career, the ultimate form of self-realization, … respondents referred to the promising sports career of their child, the care for a sick mother, the new house that needed to be built, or the weekend trip with the family that could not be missed. In the end, it was all about the common and human parts of life: too much time

pressure, family obligations, promising career opportunities, not really intending to volunteer in the first place, feelings of wasting one's time while volunteering, burnout syndromes, a lack of recognition or appreciation for one's contribution, not feeling accepted in the volunteer group, gossips and quarrels, missing the laughs and fun in the work, too much expenses incurred, and so on and so forth. Moreover, rather than a merely cognitive process, the decision to quit often had very emotional grounds rooted in the volunteers' experiences within a particular organizational setting: they did not feel accepted by the volunteer group or appreciated for their contribution, or they got into a serious conflict with a fellow volunteer or member of board. Nevertheless, volunteers also evaluated their involvement in terms of opportunities for self-realization and individual goal setting. They expected to have a say in organizational matters and showed initiative. This search for self-growth and self-expression fits the idea of 'politics of self-actualization' neatly, but it was certainly not the only or predominant mechanism inducing volunteers to terminate their involvement.

Instead of holding onto a 'grand' theory of reflexive self-actualization, it thus would seem advisable to climb down to the level of an 'everyday monitoring' of the life course as a situated, multiple and dynamic activity. The 'perpetual (re-)design of individualized life' turned out to be not that clever or profound as social theory suggests. In an everyday context, it particularly boiled down to the practical management of the (increasing) friction between different spheres of life, and the permanent effort to achieve a personal balance. Above all, the decision to quit was structurally enforced by competing events and time constraints within different spheres of life. Individual consideration and active choice entered the empirical setting, but clearly had to be situated in the context of multiple structural, organizational and social circumstances, as well as singular and situational occurrences.

It follows that a more parsimonious use of the idea of 'active' or 'reflexive' biography construction is warranted. Rather than an all-embracing and continuous process, it may

chiefly apply to highly specific biographical choices or stages in life, such as, for example, 'pioneers of flexibility' (Mutz, Kühnlein, Klement, & Janowicz, 2000) who at a certain moment decide to consciously reduce their paid work in favor of other activities. An in-depth analysis of such examples of a dramatic re-organization of individual life courses could be more revealing for understanding the 'reflexivity' of contemporary life. In this respect, the findings of this study support critical reviews of popular individualization claims in terms of a "blanket notion of extended reflexivity as a universalized response to broad social changes" (Adams, 2006, p. 518), and these critics call for a more contained and hybrid understanding of the process (Adams, 2003, 2006; Adkins, 2003; McNay, 1999).

In sum, the findings from this study suggest that the new 'reflexive volunteering', entrenched in 'politics of self-actualization' and reflected in more episodic and detached types of involvement, may not be as prevalent as is often suggested. Two important limitations of this study, however, should be mentioned. First, a major reason why former volunteers and their reasons for quitting are a generally neglected area of research is that quitters are harder to access than stayers. Organizations not only lose physical track of their former volunteers over time, as reflected in the large number of non-contacts with ex-volunteers of RCF, but also, those ex-volunteers who were the most disillusioned, or did hardly develop any sense of organizational attachment with RCF, may have refused to participate more systematically. Even if explicit refusals hardly occurred, and no systematic non-response bias was found, it cannot be ruled out that the sample was somewhat biased towards volunteers who had more positive volunteer experiences, and that the prototypical 'revolving door' volunteer may still have slipped through the survey net. In addition, former volunteers' responses are retrospective; hence may be re-framed in a more socially acceptable way. In this respect, the marginal importance of self-actualization strategies in motivations to quit may, above all, indicate that talk about external time pressures is much more part of the mainstream discourse

in society than accounting for a highly personal biographical project. The fact that respondents spoke quite frankly about their dissatisfaction with a variety of organizational issues also seems to suggest that it is much easier to explain one's actions through external factors than as part of self-authored and self-centered narratives. A profound understanding of the 'politics of self-actualization' thus seems to warrant more in-depth qualitative and ethnographic methods (e.g., Jakob, 1993).

Second, while the prototypical new volunteering may be a marginal phenomenon in service delivery organizations like RCF, this conclusion cannot be generalized to other types of organizations. The typical 'service provision model', with serious training requirements and clear-cut agreements between volunteer and organization, may structurally impede 'noncommittal' and 'plug-in' types of involvement. In contrast, there are many organizations that have a negligible base of regular and long-term committed volunteers, and rely almost solely on episodic volunteers for specific programs and event-based activities, such as campaigning organizations or cultural associations (Handy, et al., 2006; Maloney & Jordan, 1997; Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001; Stebbins & Graham, 2004). In addition, RCF is a complex organization with a multilevel governance structure and clear hierarchical divisions. Complaints about the bureaucratic or centralized nature of the organization, the lack of voice, or the gap between the local leadership and the rank-and-file volunteers, obviously reflect a particular organizational model. To draw more general conclusions, consequently, styles of volunteering and dynamics of volunteer turnover should also be investigated in, and compared across different contexts.

NOTES

(1) An overview of all attitudinal measures is available from the author upon request.

(2) A latent class analysis (LCA) was conducted using the *LEM* program, which is a general system for the analysis of categorical data (Vermunt, 1997). LCA can be used to identify a set of latent classes from a set of observed measures. For the purposes of this study, LCA was used as an exploratory method, which means that no *a priori* constraints are imposed on either type of the model's parameters. In a first step, LCA was used to generate latent class and conditional probabilities (the parameter estimates are available from the author upon request). Latent class probabilities are "the proportions of the population that are associated with each of the classes, and these must sum 1.00, indicating that in addition to being mutually exclusive, the classes are exhaustive" (McCutcheon, 1987, p. 33). Conditional probabilities indicate the probability that an observation in a latent class will be at a particular level of the observed measures (McCutcheon, 1987; McCutcheon, 2002). In a second step, observed latent class scores were computed from the latent class model. Observations were assigned to the latent classes on the basis of the 'modal classification rule'; that is, a person will be assigned to that latent class for which the estimated classification probability (i.e., the conditional probability that a person belongs to a certain latent class) is largest, given the manifest scoring (Hagenaars, 1993; McCutcheon, 1987).

(3) A core activity of RCF is to organize first aid courses for the general public. An important recruitment strategy is to ask participants in these courses to become volunteers. This could explain why a considerable group of ex-volunteers indicated they did not have the intention to volunteer in the first place. They were persuaded to give it a try, or may have felt they could not decline a direct request.

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Table 1. Behavioral indicators of volunteering

	Respondent group		Total (N=751)
	Volunteers (N=652)	Ex-volunteers (N=99)	
Length of service			
0-2 years	15.4	25.2	16.7
3-5 years	37.6	36.4	37.5
6-10 years	20.0	17.2	19.7
> 10 years	26.9	21.2	26.1
Frequency			
Weekly or more	34.2	41.4	35.2
Monthly or more	41.1	40.4	41.0
Less than monthly	24.7	18.2	23.8
Hours of volunteering per month			
≤ 4 monthly hours	20.5	22.8	20.8
5-12 monthly hours	26.2	27.2	26.4
13-24 monthly hours	24.8	18.5	23.9
> 24 monthly hours	28.5	31.5	28.9
Member on a board*			
% member on a board	29.2	19.2	27.9
Number of main programs*			
No main program	25.0	14.2	23.6
One main program	58.1	63.6	58.8
More than one main program	16.9	22.2	17.6

	Respondent group		Total (N=751)
	Volunteers (N=652)	Ex-volunteers (N=99)	
Type of activities			
% Meetings and decision making	52.3	50.0	52.0
% Organization of activities	30.3	37.5	31.3
% Assistance	84.6	77.1	83.6
% Administrative tasks	25.4	26.0	25.5
% Training and lectures	23.7	29.2	24.4
% Funding activities	51.9	63.5	53.4
% Chores	31.2	32.3	31.4

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2: Behavioral indicators of volunteering across (former) patterns of volunteering (modal class assignment)

	Volunteers (N=652)					Ex-volunteers (N=99)		
	I	II	III	IV	V	I	II	III
	N=142	N=62	N=208	N=158	N=82	N=18	N=38	N=43
	21.8%	9.5%	31.8%	24.3%	12.6%	18.2%	38.4%	43.4%
Length of service***								
0-2 years	18.6	2.9	23.0	23.4	00.0	0.0	29.0	32.6
3-5 years	45.7	13.4	46.8	45.9	00.0	16.7	34.2	46.5
6-10 years	13.0	31.2	16.2	15.5	31.4	27.8	18.4	11.6
> 10 years	22.7	52.5	14.0	15.2	68.6	55.5	18.4	9.3
Frequency***								
Once or several times a year	100.0	23.4	0.0	1.5	0.7	0.0	2.6	39.5
Once or several times a month	0.0	57.8	100.0	12.2	8.1	11.1	31.6	60.5
Weekly or more	0.0	18.8	0.0	86.3	91.2	88.9	65.8	0.0
Monthly hours of volunteering***								

≤ 4 hours per month	76.9	35.6	14.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	48.8
5-12 hours per month	15.1	64.4	43.0	7.6	0.0	11.1	21.1	51.2
13-24 hours per month	6.2	0.0	28.1	40.3	37.0	22.2	34.2	0.0
> 24 hours per month	1.8	0.0	14.8	52.0	63.0	66.7	44.7	0.0
Member on a volunteer board***								
% member	0.0	74.6	2.3	36.3	100.0	100.0	0.00	2.3
Number of main programs***								
None	47.9	67.8	14.3	5.9	17.7	16.7	10.5	16.3
One	44.6	21.1	62.3	67.1	41.8	38.9	65.8	72.1
More than one	7.5	11.1	23.4	27.0	40.5	44.4	23.7	11.6
Type of volunteer activities								
% Meetings & decision-making***	19.7	60.5	43.8	65.9	87.11	94.4	36.8	42.5
% Organization of activities***	6.8	26.9	22.9	37.6	71.21	94.4	36.8	12.5
% Assistance***	69.7	69.8	87.2	91.8	82.46	83.3	84.2	67.5
% Administrative tasks***	5.7	31.2	8.6	33.7	75.72	94.4	13.2	7.5

% Training and lectures	16.2	21.7	21.9	24.2	35.25	61.1	23.7	20.0
% Funding activities***	30.7	40.1	51.3	56.9	78.29	94.4	68.4	45.0
% Chores***	7.5	28.2	29.9	39.8	54.52	61.1	36.8	15.0

Note: χ^2-statistic: * $p < .01$ ** $p < .001$ *** $p < .0001$

Volunteers: I = Supportive peripheral; II = Administrative intermediate; III = Supportive intermediate; IV = Service-oriented core; V = All-round core; Former volunteers: I = 'All-round core'; II = 'Service-oriented core'; III = 'Supportive peripheral'.

Table 3. Reasons for quitting according to patterns and duration of former involvement

	Patterns			Duration			Total
	I	II	III	0-2y	3-5y	>5y	
BIOGRAPHICAL							
Work	22.2	47.4	39.5	40.0	33.3	44.7	39.4
Family, partner °	33.3	31.6	18.6	12.0	22.2	39.5	26.3
Leisure time	27.8	7.9	25.6	24.0	16.7	18.4	19.2
Other private reasons	33.3	26.3	41.9	44.0	38.9	23.7	34.4
ORGANIZATIONAL							
Functioning organization or chapter *	61.1	36.8	23.3	20.9	36.1	44.7	35.3
Supervision, support, training *	22.2	5.3	4.6	0.0	8.3	13.2	8.1
Expenses	5.6	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	5.3	2.0
Participation	22.2	10.5	4.6	0.0	11.1	15.8	10.1
Recognition, appreciation *	27.8	13.2	4.6	8.0	13.9	13.2	12.1
Nature, content of work	5.6	7.9	6.9	16.0	0.0	7.9	7.1
Quantity, size of work	11.1	7.9	9.3	8.0	8.3	10.5	9.1
Obligations, organizational demands	11.1	18.4	4.6	8.0	11.1	13.2	11.1
Personal satisfaction or benefit	5.6	5.3	11.6	8.0	8.3	7.9	8.1
Other organization-related reasons	11.1	21.1	20.9	16.0	22.2	18.4	19.2
Total	18	38	43	25	36	38	99

Note: Patterns: * < .05 Duration: ° < .05

Patterns: I = All-round core; II = Service-oriented core; III = Supportive peripheral